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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

Letter dated 27 June 1994 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/155 of 20 December 1993, I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the appeal by the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation to the Parliaments of the States participating in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, adopted on 24 June 1994, and the statement issued on 22 June 1994 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation concerning the adoption by the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia of the Republic of Latvia Citizenship Act.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annexes circulated as a document of the General Assembly under item 104 of the preliminary list.

(Signed) Y. VORONTSOV

* A/49/50/Rev.1.

ANNEX I

Appeal to the Parliaments of the States participating in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in connection with the adoption by the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia of the Republic of Latvia Citizenship Act on 24 June 1994

On 24 June 1994, in spite of the many protests of the international community and in disregard of the recommendations of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the Council of Europe and various international experts, the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia adopted the Republic of Latvia Citizenship Act, which deprives hundreds of thousands of permanent residents of that country of their citizenship and abridges their political, social, economic, cultural and other rights.

The Latvian authorities have blatantly flouted universally recognized standards in the field of human rights, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, not to mention the recommendations of international experts with respect to Latvia which relate to the inadmissibility of a situation in which a substantial number of permanent residents of that country, including people who were born there and who wish to have citizenship, have become stateless persons.

In these circumstances, the parliamentarians of the Russian Federation cannot remain indifferent to the situation of members of a national minority whose right to acquire Latvian citizenship has been unlawfully restricted, especially since the radical nationalists in Latvia make no attempt to conceal their intention of stepping up the pressure on these inhabitants with the aim of "squeezing" them out of the country. Following the introduction of a series of discriminatory measures in Riga prior to the adoption of the Republic of Latvia Citizenship Act, there are now plans to introduce harsh legislation dealing, inter alia, with language, schools, changes in the law applicable to aliens and religion. As in the past, all of this is being done without any intercommunal dialogue in Latvia involving the individuals whose citizenship is being taken away, whose interests are not represented in the elected bodies either at the central or the local level.

The continued pursuit of such an approach could result in a dangerous destabilization of the situation in Latvia and in the Baltic region as a whole. The only reasonable solution would be for the Parliament of Latvia to reconsider the policy on national minorities and repeal the discriminatory provisions of the Latvian Citizenship Act.

In this sense, it might be said that Latvia's future, the achievement of genuine - rather than illusory - national security, and the possibility of establishing a democratic State based on the rule of law now depends in large measure on the extent to which the international community, and first and foremost the States participating in CSCE and their parliaments, take an active stand on this issue. We call upon them to speak up forcefully, to defend the principles of humanism that are gaining ground in Europe, to refuse to allow

Latvia to continue its slide into aggressive nationalism and to refuse to accept the emergence of a source of tension in the Baltic region.

Obviously, the action taken by the Latvian Parliament cannot but have a most negative impact on the bilateral relations of the Russian Federation with the Republic of Latvia. The Federation Council will have to consider separately the question of measures for the protection of the legitimate rights and interests of the inhabitants of Latvia who are the victims of discrimination.

ANNEX II

Statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on 22 June 1994

On 21 June 1994, the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia adopted the Citizenship Act. This legislation, which is unprecedented in terms of its content, will deprive a growing number of ethnic Russians who are permanent residents of that country of any real possibility of obtaining Latvian citizenship.

The Act contains provisions which entail discrimination on the basis of nationality. It embodies the principles, rejected by international experts, of naturalization quotas for permanent residents of Latvia, and provides that naturalization will begin to take effect only starting in the year 2000. Thus, on the eve of the twenty-first century, a State which claims to be democratic and based on the rule of law has taken a further step in legislating discrimination against hundreds of thousands of inhabitants of the Republic of Latvia and in establishing a mono-ethnic State.

Well before the adoption of the Citizenship Act, Latvia, having deprived the "non-indigenous" inhabitants of the right to citizenship, deliberately discriminated against them, especially in the political, social and economic spheres, and towards that end adopted laws and regulations governing, in particular, elections to government organs at the central and local levels, the civil service, languages, electioneering, the entry and stay of aliens, and the police. These texts have been extremely damaging to the situation of hundreds of thousands of permanent residents, a great many of whom are individuals of Russian origin, and have provided a legal basis for consolidating the discrimination practised in Latvia on the basis of nationality, language and religion, in particular.

The Latvian authorities continue to disregard the real conditions in the country and to flout basic human rights instruments, the opinion of international experts and the recommendations of the CSCE High Commissioner for national minorities and the Council of Europe, as well as the appeals made by several neighbouring States concerning the rights of national minorities. It is impossible to interpret this attitude as anything other than an overt challenge to the current democratic and humanist trends in Europe and the world.

In these circumstances, the absence of an appropriate international reaction and, what is more, the admission of Latvia to the Council of Europe would appear to be approval of the discriminatory policy of that country's authorities and would signify the weakening of international and European standards in the area of respect for human rights.

For its part, the Russian Federation, will, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/155, entitled "Situation of human rights in Latvia and Estonia", and in view of the fact that the human rights situation has deteriorated further in Latvia, work resolutely to ensure that Latvia abides by the international obligations it has assumed.

The Russian Federation's stance with regard to future relations with Latvia will take into account developments in that country in connection with the adoption of the Citizenship Act.